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ABSTRACT

This booklet describes a school district's evolution from a neatly compartmentalized language arts curriculum to a curriculum integrated around broad topics and themes of study. Sections of the booklet discuss the mounting tensions in the school district's language arts program; committee work that formed the foundation for change; the 5 target behaviors or skills which form the "spine" of the language arts program; the need for defining some priorities for thematic studies; teacher support; the "critical moments" during the evolution of the curriculum to thematic studies; and what the future holds. Throughout the booklet, set off in italic print, are the researcher's current reflections about school change. An appendix provides a list of trade books (one for each of the grades K-6) on the topics of personal feelings and growth; friends and family; social issues and culture; imagination, thought, and humor; folklore, heroes, and legends; yesterday; my world and others; environment; and living things. (RS)

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LITERACY IMPROVEMENT SERIES
FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS

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Improving the Literacy Program: A Journey Toward Integrated Curriculum

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Each year I chaperon a class of high school seniors on a hike to Grinnell Glacier. A bunch of raucous teenagers and I walk the steep trail past lakes and waterfalls to a huge mass of ice on the eastern front of Glacier Park. I'm always struck by this magnificent glacier propped among the peaks. I hear it crack and groan as it chisels its U-shaped valley. As we tread with ice axes and ropes, stepping over and around crevasses, I observe changes only a seasoned viewer would note. A massive boulder recently wrenched from the valley floor now perches on the surface. I peer into the blue crevices. Somehow they seem deeper and more angular than the year before. I capture changes with my camera. My lens focuses on a moment. Snapshots in a progression of time.

When I think about my work, sometimes I feel astride a mass of living ice crawling down a mountainside. Each year we work hard to carve and mold our systems to accept new knowledge and meet the challenges of today's children. Changes have occurred, but sometimes they are hard to see unless you step back. Our institutions are like those rugged granite walls resisting change. There's such comfort in the status quo. Yet nothing, not even the spectacular environment in which I live, can remain the same.

I have worked as language arts facilitator in one district for the past 15 years. In those early years our language arts curriculum had a very different look than it does now. It was neatly compartmentalized into subject areas centering on texts, and we conveniently marched our students through the materials. We had separate times each day for reading, science, and social studies. Our curriculum was defined by what was in the text, and we did our best to cover as much of it as we could. There was little integration, and our students did little reading and writing in school.

Now the picture in most classrooms is far different. Our curriculum is integrated around broad topics and themes of study. Science, language arts, and social studies merge. Textbooks have become just another resource for expanding upon a theme. Students participate in whole class novel studies, in literature discussion groups, and in reading self-selected books during reading and writing workshop. Children spend far more time reading and writing in school. Assessment is no longer accomplished by the tests at the end of the basal reader but by a variety of measures tied closely to what students are learning.

When I talk about our curriculum with teachers and administra-

tors outside of our district, I am always asked about the evolution of these changes. "What were the steps that you went through to get to where you are now?" "How did you grind your way down this mountainside?" Probably the best way to talk about our process is to focus on those critical moments.

I have already written about our change efforts in an earlier article (Santa, 1991), but since then we have created more landscapes. So, let me do a brief recap of our beginnings, move onto the present, and then conclude with some future speculations. As I retell this story, I will also add some of my current reflections about school change. Even though the specifics of our story are unique to the district, our process of change is adaptable to different contexts.

The Beginnings: Literacy Explorations and Tension

I am convinced that all change begins with mounting tension. Probably one of the most important roles I play in my district is to create tension. We must never be totally satisfied with what we do. We place our theories on the line and discover new theory through professional reading and conferences, conversations with colleagues, and observing students in their learning environments. Growth creates vitality. The old no longer feels quite right. At first we feel mild discomfort, but gradually the urge to grow becomes a driving force no longer to be ignored.

Tension began to mount about our language arts program. Our children weren't reading or writing very much in school. While some teachers felt satisfied with the status quo, others did not. Something had to be done to create more discomfort and to help teachers begin testing and revising their theories about language arts teaching.

One way to create tension is through staff development. Fortunately, in our district, staff development has strong administrative support. Teachers can select from many options such as in-house college classes, in-service sessions built into the school calendar, professional conferences, and summer literacy institutes.

Our summer literacy institutes, funded by a grant from an outside benefactor, have been our most successful staff development experiences. We have been fortunate to have Ralph Peterson, Carol

Avery, Tom Romano, Linda Rief, and Richard Stiggins as leaders of these week-long institutes. Teachers learned about reading and writing workshop (Avery, 1994, Rief, 1991, Romano, 1987), assessment alternatives (Spandel and Stiggins, 1990), and literature discussion groups (Peterson, 1990).

Tension mounted as my colleagues and I learned more about the development and teaching of literacy. Knowledge led us to question our teaching practices. Slowly changes began to occur in instruction. Reading and writing workshop emerged in classes. Real books began replacing the basal reader. Teachers began integrating their curriculum. A sense of renewal flowed from classroom to classroom.

Yet, some doors remained closed. Divisions occurred between teachers caught up within the tide and those remaining on the outside. Cracks appeared in our curriculum and these cracks began to affect our students. Some students had difficulty adjusting as they moved between classrooms with very different philosophical stances. Several parents complained.

I am convinced that all change begins with mounting tension.

Questions about content also emerged. As teachers began doing cross-curricular studies, some hot topics surfaced. For example, it seemed like every primary teacher had units on insects and dinosaurs. Should students study dinosaurs three years in a row? Teachers also worried about time. How can we do rich thematic studies and have time for reading and writing workshop, mathematics, music, and art? We still have to teach American history in grade five and world history in grade six!

Too many dangling issues needed resolution. Fortunately, we have a management system in place. We have curriculum committees responsible for major decisions about content and instruction. These committees comprise about 12 people who represent teachers from each of our five elementary schools and a range of grade levels from kindergarten through high school. Two elementary principals are also committee members.

The Language Arts Committee began grappling with the situation. During several release days we began defining issues and

questions and then began orchestrating a change effort that slowly gathered momentum.

Laying Groundwork for Change

The committee decided to examine several issues simultaneously. We wanted teachers to dream and to make their theories about literacy learning explicit. Teachers deserved time to step back and reflect on what they thought a language arts program should look like. We also wanted input from our students. What did they want in a language arts program? So often we forget to ask our consumers for their theories. Finally, we wanted to keep our school board informed throughout our change process.

School Board

If we were going to make some drastic changes in our literacy programs, we wanted the school board on our side. Several committee members and I gave a short presentation to the board about using trade books in our classroom rather than our adopted basal program. We talked about the conclusions from *Becoming a Nation of Readers* (1984) which were critical of the skills-based workbook approach to reading. We also told them about tensions festering among teachers and about our plan to uncover students' and teachers' beliefs about what a language arts program might look like.

Their reactions were positive, but the board also offered us some suggestions. They worried about scores on standardized tests. Our students have always done well on the *Iowa Test of Basic Skills*, and they didn't want to compromise this trend. Therefore, we agreed to collect some test data comparing classes that had abandoned the basal with classrooms still using the basal program.

Standardized Test Information

To address the board's concerns, the committee conducted a simple study. We looked at the reading scores from classrooms using only books for language arts (no basal anthologies or workbooks) and compared them with those from classrooms continuing to use the traditional basal program. We worried that students in a basal program would probably do better on a standardized assessment. After all, the formats were similar.

The results surprised us. Students reading books during language arts time performed higher on achievement tests than students in classrooms tied to the basal reader. This discovery proved to be quite helpful not only for the school board but also for several committee members worried that abandoning a basal would automatically lower scores on tests. We could now actually use standardized test performance as a way to support our case for moving away from a traditional program.

Student Responses

To gather input from students, I asked teachers if I could spend about five minutes in their classes talking with students about language arts.

I began this discussion with a simple experiment. In one hand I had a brand new basal anthology; in the other, I held a library book. I asked the children, "Should we spend our money on anthologies or should we spend our money on real books?"

In practically every classroom there was 100 percent agreement. Students always voted in favor of real books. They also volunteered their opinions. They talked about how their reading at home differed from their reading at school. None of them took a basal anthology to read in bed. Their vote was firm—spend the budget on books.

Not only was it important for me to hear their responses, but it was even more important for teachers to learn from their students. Teachers locked into a traditional system often expressed surprise at their students' reactions. Hearing students talk about how they read so much more at home than at school and how they disliked workbook pages nudged some teachers to begin rethinking their own philosophies about teaching.

Uncovering Teaching Philosophies

So often teachers aren't really in touch with their own theories. They don't have opportunities to articulate what they currently believe. Moreover, they can't change their theories until they know what they already believe. The committee also needed to know where teachers stood in order to know what to do next. Therefore, we wanted teachers to step back and reflect on what they thought a language arts program should look like.

We began by designing a survey instrument (Santa, 1991). The

Reading Program Survey

Name (optional): _____
Teaching or administrative assignment: _____

Part I: Current practices

1. Check the program that you primarily use:
   - ☐ a. Fiction and non-fiction books incorporated within cross-curricular themes.
   - ☐ b. Basal program
   - ☐ c. Combination of a and b

   Results: 95 percent of the primary teachers responded to c; by grade 5 a majority of teachers were using trade books as their primary program.

2. How do you primarily evaluate your reading program?
   - ☐ a. Basal assessments
   - ☐ b. Teacher- and student-generated assessments.

   Results: from 90 to 100 percent of the teachers used basal assessments.

3. Are you satisfied with your assessment program?

   Results: 100 percent dissatisfaction.

Part II: What kind of reading program do you want for the 1990s?

Below are three options. Which option best fits your own view?

Option 1: Reading and writing workshop should form the major part of a reading program. Children should spend a majority of time reading self-selected books and writing on self-selected topics. In kindergarten and grade one there should be an abundance of big books for shared reading. Language experience should be a major component of the kindergarten and first grade program. Instruction in reading comprehension and studying takes place in science, social studies and other content areas. Science and social studies topics are incorporated within the language arts program through nonfiction trade books and literary themes.

Option 2: A reading program of the 1990s should follow traditional basal models. Children spend most of their time reading in readers containing short stories or excerpts of novels. Children are grouped according to ability and progress through the basals at varying rates. English skills and content subjects such as science and social studies are separate from the language arts program.

Option 3: A reading program for the 1990s should be midway between options 1 and 2. The look of the program is similar to a traditional basal, but the focus is more on cross-integrative themes. Skills are assessed with on tasks demanding reading and writing, rather than fill-in-the-blank activities. The anthology selections are designed to be the link to the library and novels. Students spend at least half of their language arts time reading self-selected books. Class novels, smaller sets of novels, and classroom libraries could supplement the program. Content area instruction for the most part remains separate from language arts.

Results: The majority of primary teachers chose Option 3 (responses ranged from 100 to 60 percent). The grade 4-6 teachers responded quite differently; from 60 to 75 percent chose Option 1.

survey asked teachers to describe their language arts programs and approaches to assessment, and to do some dreaming. What would they like to see in a language arts program? A copy of the survey is included on the facing page.

The information provided the committee with some important discoveries. Most primary teachers combined the basal program with trade books, while a majority of the upper grade teachers had pretty much abandoned the basal for trade books. None of the teachers was pleased with current approaches to assessment. Most continued to use the end of level tests from the basal program even when they had switched from using the basal reader to using trade books.

Even though teachers realized that the assessments no longer reflected classroom practice, they were still hanging onto them. They wanted some way to measure student performance and felt the basal tests were better than nothing. Tension increased about assesment. A majority of teachers wanted to explore alternatives more closely matching the literacy behaviors of their students.

A majority of teachers wanted to explore assessment alternatives more closely matching the literacy behaviors of their students.

After compiling the data, the committee asked principals of each school to interview their teachers. We had two reasons for doing this. First, we wanted the teachers to elaborate on their dreams. Second, we wanted principals to participate and hear first hand what their teachers believed. The principals hired a roving substitute teacher in each school so they could spend about 30 minutes talking with each teacher. "What would you like to see in a language arts program if you could design it from the ground up?" As the teachers talked, the principals took notes.

The committee examined the data for trends that we used for developing a draft philosophy statement. The principals then took this draft back to the teachers for final comments. Most principals collected these comments during special staff meetings after school. Finally, the committee incorporated these ideas into the

Philosophy

- Reading and writing workshop should occur daily.
- The core of the language arts program should be real books. Students deserve experience with common literature and reading from self-selected books.
- Reading instruction must be incorporated within realistic situations and integrated with content areas.
- Science, social studies and language arts should be combined into cross-curricular themes.
- The primary response to reading should be writing and student-generated discussion.
- Children deserve systematic instruction in reading comprehension.
- While emphasis should be on "real" reading and writing, children deserve to have an understanding of sound/symbol relationships as a tool for writing and reading.
- Assessments should help students understand their own growth and should be closely tied to instruction.

final statement of philosophy, which ended up being about a five-page document. A summary of this document is in the box above.

Coming to consensus on our beliefs served as the foundation to guide the next steps in our development. Our future direction was clear: We couldn't go back to our old basal system, and we could no longer separate our curriculum into discrete subject areas. Teachers wanted reading instruction tied into the content subjects where students were using reading to learn content. There was tremendous dissatisfaction with assessment and fear that students were missing out on critical skills. In fact, teachers clinging tightly to their basals were doing so because they feared students would miss key skills. They wanted to use real books in their classes and to integrate the curriculum, but they needed the assurance that students would also learn important reading skills. Moreover, many expressed insecurities about how to use novels in their classroom. So, our new language arts philosophy meant that the committee had

plenty of work to do. Before recounting our next tasks, let me step back and make a few comments about our process so far.

Current Reflections

Now that it has been several years since we gathered this information, I have the luxury to think back on what we did and reflect on our processes. Hopefully these reflections will help out others who are also in the midst of restructuring efforts.

While our process worked well, I felt frustrated at times with the slowness of the whole effort. I wanted everyone to choose Option One on the survey—the more holistic, integrated approach to reading. I discovered that the critical mass was not yet ready for such a dramatic change. We had to compromise.

I also realized how assessment issues can keep teachers from exploring new ideas in the classroom. Even though there was never any administrative dictum for using basal assessments, many teachers felt pressured to use them. The assessments were a kind of security blanket. The controlling power of assesssments was far greater than I ever realized. Tests that no longer match instruction stifle change.

A critical element in our change process was the involvement of the school board. I have discovered that keeping our board informed about research and trends in curricular areas is critical. I am always sending the board professional articles about literacy. School boards can become staunch supporters when they understand the philosophy and rationale behind a change effort. The board was very helpful—even though I cringed when they wanted standardized test data. Fortunately, we were able to use the test results as ammunition for our desired changes.

We also involved our principals as part of our research team. Our principals represented a range of philosophies similar to our teachers. Having principals do the interviewing ended up being a bright idea. They needed to hear firsthand what teachers believed. After this participation, they became far more active in our change efforts. I also gave brief reports about our progress at monthly principal meetings. The principals provided the committee with many practical ideas for the entire change effort. Their support and leadership was essential.

Involving students also turned out to be critical, and if I repeated this whole scenario, I would involve them even more. They

knew exactly what they wanted and were totally direct in their suggestions. I wish that I had documented their responses more using audio or video tapes. Their input would have helped to convince parents and wavering teachers to move toward using real literature in the classrooms.

Conducting the survey turned out to be critical. Those of us who are change agents in school usually surround ourselves with the most dynamic teachers and sometimes fail to recognize that others might be in different stages of development. For real change to occur, it is critical to know where people stand so that we can figure out ways to support teachers in their own transition efforts.

As I look back at this survey, the instrument looks archaic to me now. Yet, this is where we were, and it was important to have a survey instrument representing the range of instruction prevalent at the time. I am glad we wrote the survey so that teachers dreamed about a future program. This helped some of our more traditional teachers step outside of their present contexts. We learned that many traditional teachers actually want to change.

The survey is also a nice historical piece. As I review this instrument, I realize how much we have changed—there has been progress. A majority of teachers at every grade level would now probably choose an option similar to number one—it feels good to know that we have progressed farther down that mountainside.

Coming to consensus about our belief systems helped bring us together as a district. Fortunately, the vocal "basal guard" was the minority rather than the majority voice. The advocates of traditional basals became less vocal as they realized they were falling further out of the mainstream.

Making our beliefs explicit also gave us direction to insure that this philosophy carried through into practice, and the gathering of evidence helped define the next steps in our change efforts. The committee began itemizing the tasks that became the next chapters in our evolution.

We needed to:

- *Develop a scope and sequence of reading strategies or skills that we could link to assessments*
- *Define topics and themes of study, and purchase class sets of books and other materials that would support these themes*

- *Develop ways to support teachers in using literature in their classrooms*
- *Develop alternative assessments and different ways of reporting information to parents*

Development of Target Literacy Behaviors

To get started with this process, the language arts committee prepared a list of reading and writing skills or behaviors reflecting our philosophy. The committee decided that it would be easier for teachers to respond to a draft than to create their own list.

We began by prioritizing elements of our philosophy and generating reading strategies or target behaviors tied to our philosophy. While our philosophy and corresponding targets were more detailed than the summary presented here, a brief description of our process might be helpful to other districts involved in curriculum development.

Our first priority was to insure that our students read extensively, so we linked reading and writing workshop to this philosophical statement and made it our first target behavior, Target 1. Our next priority was comprehension. According to our philosophy, we believed that comprehension instruction should be included as part of thematic studies and that it should focus on writing and discussion. Based on these views we began itemizing specific comprehension behaviors reflecting this philosophy. We clustered these behaviors under Target 2, which we called comprehending, studying and evaluating ideas. Each of the behaviors operationalized our philosophical stance about how comprehension should be taught. We also organized the Target 3 skills, reference strategies, with the statements about cross-curricular themes. It made sense for reference and library skills to become a part of thematic studies rather than something taught separately. Next we clustered phonics and vocabulary, Target 4, with the statements about thematic teaching to insure that these skills were not taught separately but as part of literature studies. Likewise, we placed Target 5, sentence skills, with extended reading and writing so that work with conventions (punctuation and usage) was incorporated as part of revision and editing during writing workshop. In the end we organized all of our reading behaviors under these five targets which were in turn tied to our philosophical statements (see the box on the next page).

Philosophy	Corresponding Target Behaviors
Students deserve to read and write extensively.	Target 1: Reading and Writing Workshop Target 5: Sentence Skills
The core of the language arts program should be real books.	Target 1: Reading and Writing Workshop Target 5: Sentence Skills
The primary response to reading should be writing and student-generated discussion.	Target 1: Reading and Writing Workshop Target 5: Sentence Skills
Children deserve systematic instruction in reading comprehension.	Target 2: Comprehension
Reading instruction must be incorporated within realistic situations and integrated with content areas.	Target 3: Reference Skills Target 4: Vocabulary and Word Recognition
Science, social studies, and language arts should be combined into cross-curricular themes.	Target 3: Reference Skills Target 4: Vocabulary and Word Recognition
While emphasis should be on "real" reading and writing, children deserve to have an understanding of sound/symbol relationships as a tool for writing and reading.	Target 3: Reference Skills Target 4: Vocabulary and Word Recognition

After linking general literacy behaviors (targets) to our philosophy statements, our next task was to begin describing more specific student behaviors under each target. As we defined these behaviors, we also came up with ideas for assessment.

The process of creating this first draft took three half days of release time. We found that half days worked well because the work

was intense, and we needed several weeks in between each session to think through each task. This also gave me time to pull together the information and to figure out what we needed to accomplish in succeeding sessions.

Once we completed our draft, committee members and principals presented it in their own schools during staff meetings. Each teacher received a copy and was asked to provide written feedback. We made sure that everyone had input into the document. Principals collected the comments from each teacher and returned them to me.

With this feedback the committee revised the skills sequence once more. Then, all teachers again received copies of this second draft, which they brought to grade level meetings for final input. The comments from these meetings were forwarded to me, and I made changes in the document. Next, the committee met again to add their final revisions. Then, we hired substitutes so that committee members could spend a day in the teachers' lounge of each elementary school and ask for final comments from teachers during their planning periods and at lunch. The committee met one more time after school to finalize the document and then reviewed it with parent representatives from each school. Finally, committee members held a study session with the school board for their input. Three years after beginning with our initial survey to teachers, the school board approved the document, and it now stands as our official language arts curriculum—whew!

Current Reflections

Our process was painfully slow as we debated issues, and I often became frustrated with the pace. What I thought would be a year-long project moved into two and then finally into three years of development. Yet, being cautious was exactly what we needed to do. We could not have moved any faster given the size of our district and the number of different constituencies. Every teacher and administrator was involved. This turned out to be critical—particularly for the few, but vocal, foot-draggers. Some teachers chose to give no input but at least they had the opportunity. This made it difficult for negative voices to later complain about the curriculum. Everyone—teachers, parents, school board members and children—needed to own the process.

Developing our philosophy first really helped us in designing our

target areas. We constantly referred back to our belief statements to make sure target behaviors reflected what we believed. In fact, we didn't keep anything in our curriculum that did not fit with our philosophy. Our philosophy in effect became our template for developing the more specific literacy skills.

Defining our expectations of student performance at each grade level freed teachers from using the basal readers and the end of unit assessments. The target skills in our curriculum are quite different than those taught in published programs. The basal was no longer the appropriate tool for either instruction or assessment.

If I were to relive these three years, I would have involved parents far earlier in the process. The parents ended up being totally supportive of our efforts, and they offered us important insights. They might have moved our process along more quickly.

A final reflection deals with principals. The elementary principals participated throughout the entire process. Each month I met with them about curriculum and talked about the committee's plans. The principals always had ideas about how to make the process work better. They believed in the teachers and understood why teachers must build their own curriculum. They became undercover agents of change in their schools. The principals kept issues alive in staff meetings through informal conversations, by routing professional readings, and by creating time for teachers to work. While stepping out of their teachers' way, they insured that change happened.

Target Behaviors

The curriculum contains five target behaviors or skills which form the "spine" of our language arts program. Teachers make sure to focus on the behaviors at their grade level with whatever materials they happen to be using in their classrooms. The strategies also provide a clear framework for assessment.

The document is concise. It contains a three-page philosophy statement followed by a brief description of reading behaviors according to grade level (K-6). Let's take a moment and briefly examine each target and complementary assessment behaviors.

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Target 1: Extended Reading and Writing

It is no accident that Extended Reading and Writing is our first target. We wanted to make sure that students had opportunities during school to select their own books to read and write on topics of their own choice. Most teachers in adapting the workshop model to their classrooms have relied heavily on the work of Lucy Calkins (1986), Nancy Atwell (1987), Linda Rief (1991), and Tom Romano (1987). Teachers and students have designed various ways to keep track of student progress in writing. Most have developed portfolio systems.

Besides having reading and writing workshop at school, we also have a target specifying home reading. In fact, the only homework we encourage in language arts is home reading. Teachers and administrators generate parent support for the home reading program through school newsletters, parent letters, and back to school nights. Teachers also send home with the children calendars or reading records where students keep track of their reading. The amount of time children spend reading or the number of books read at home is up to the child, the child's parents, and the teacher. The children and parents set reading goals and then monitor these goals. The children bring their home reading records back to school and keep them in their reading portfolios.

The example on the next page is a home reading calendar from grade one. Darleda Tedro, a first-grade teacher, also asks her students to keep track of any math activities they do at home.

Target 2: Comprehending, Studying and Evaluating Ideas

Target 2 behaviors are divided into three categories: (1) using main ideas, (2) applying study strategies, and (3) recalling, comparing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas. In each category the strategies are practical and used in situations wherein students need to learn information or write about a topic. For example, main idea instruction centers on organizing strategies (concept mapping and note taking) and expository writing where students develop paragraphs and expository papers.

The scope and sequence of strategies includes a strong component on applying study strategies. Beginning in grade two, teachers demonstrate, and have students practice, selective underlining and a variety of note taking systems. They incorporate the teaching of these strategies within their interdisciplinary studies. By the time

Homework Log

Name Jacob

Please return in Monday's folder

Reading Goal (in minutes)		Weekly Total
35	Read Alouds (RA) by parent	72
15	Shared Reading (SR) child reads	25
35	Child Reading (CR) silently	15

Directions

1. Set a goal for this week with your child. Record.
2. Keep track of the minutes of reading and the type of reading on the calendar.
3. Record math activities, too! Do at least 1 a week.
4. Total reading minutes and return.

Comments:

Jacob's parent signature

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
RA - 20 SR - 10	CR - 10	RA - 12 Wonderful! I love your math activities! Keep it up, Jacob!	SR - 5 RA - 10 SR - 5	RA - 20min Math Counted down until grandma gets here		RA 10 SR 5 CR 5
Mrs. Lee added the minutes for Reading Goals			19			

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children reach sixth grade, they know a variety of methods to organize and learn content information. In addition to the creative writing prevalent during writing workshop, they have also learned how to write reports and essays.

Within the third category, recalling, comparing, analyzing, and evaluating ideas, students use critical thinking strategies. They sequence ideas, analyze narratives using story structures, debate and write about issues and opinions, compare and evaluate ideas and lead their own discussions about literature and content.

Teachers and students evaluate performance with products that students keep in portfolios. The products might include copies of notes, concept maps, paragraphs, and questions used for discussion. Students select their best examples of these products and then explain why they think they represent their best work.

Target 3: Reference Skills

Students practice dictionary skills and use the library for research for written and oral presentations. Evaluation of reference skills occurs primarily through research products occurring as part of thematic studies. If students can use the library to conduct research for written and oral reports, we know that they have internalized essential reference skills.

Target 4: Vocabulary and Word Recognition

A major concern of primary teachers, afraid to abandon the basal program, was phonics instruction. They worried about instruction occurring too randomly and about students who have difficulties with reading. So Target 4 includes a list of word recognition behaviors along with procedures for teaching. Instruction in letter-sound connections does not follow a particular sequence but instead emerges from the literature studies. Once students have enough experience with certain letter-sound patterns in their reading, these patterns become the focus of phonics instruction.

We also derived some simple procedures for assessment. Teachers evaluate by noting the presence of the element in a child's writing, by having children read word lists containing the element or by having children spell word lists containing an element. For example, if short e has been the focus of instruction as part of a literature study, teachers might check for understanding by having students write. They might ask students to take out a slip of paper

or their chalkboard slates and write several words they know containing short e. The children hold up the slates and the teacher notes those who might need more assistance. Those needing more help are brought together for a short-term special needs group. Most teachers record students progress with phonics elements on checklists. Teachers find this form of assessment easier to manage and more direct than those commonly found with basal programs.

Target 5: Sentence Skills

Usage, mechanics, grammar, and sentence skills are taught through children's own writing and by having students edit a sentence a day. Each day, as part of a whole class activity, the children edit a sentence for mechanics and usage. These revisions, as well as the revisions that occur as part of writing workshop, provide a realistic way for teaching and evaluating how well students have internalized punctuation, usage, and sentence conventions.

Current Reflections

As I describe our process of curriculum development, it is important to remember that our philosophy and target behaviors are important for our school district, but they really aren't transferrable to other districts. Each system must create its own. You can't take ours and stick it into another system. It won't work. There simply isn't the buy-in. Yet many of the processes that we went through in developing our curriculum are transferrable.

For example, developing our own scope and sequence of strategies and deriving some direct ways to teach and evaluate these skills was critical to the continuing evolution of our curriculum. Once we had an established list of literacy behaviors along with some suggestions for assessment, teachers had permission to teach thematically and to incorporate reading and writing workshop in their classrooms.

Moreover, the teachers slowly realized that the reading comprehension and writing strategies in our list were far more useful to students than those found in any prescribed program. Students actually learned how to learn, how to lead their own discussions, and how to respond to their reading through both creative and expository writing. The behaviors reflected what real readers and writers do.

As we developed our target behaviors, we were also designing the

content focus of our curriculum. Developing our scope and sequence of target skills first was critical to the development of thematic studies because the skills provided a framework for the literacy behaviors taught through the studies.

Defining Topics and Themes of Study

The need for defining some priorities for thematic studies emerged as we became more and more committed to using trade books. Conflicts arose about novel selection and curriculum content. Specifying some "protected" themes and topics for each grade level became the solution to both issues.

Sacred Literature

We decided to purchase class sets of reinforced bound books for the libraries. Class sets of books made good sense because they gave teachers considerable flexibility. Teachers could teach a novel as a whole class or use a smaller number of books for literature discussion groups. At first, we made our purchases fairly randomly based on what seemed to work well for specific grade levels and teachers.

However, teachers complained that some novels had already been read aloud or taught as a class novel in previous grades. The novels were not fresh for their students. Others argued that freshness didn't matter because students could read the book again.

To solve this problem, the language arts committee decided to specify some "sacred" literature per grade. We made a rule that a sacred book could not be used as a class book or read aloud in grades lower than where it was specified but that it could be used above the specified grade. For example, in grade four, one of our sacred books, *There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom*, could not be used as a class novel or read-aloud in earlier grades, but a sixth-grade teacher could choose to use it, particularly if the sixth graders had not already read it in grade four. In this way, teachers could be sure that the book had not been taught as part of school curriculum, but if it hadn't been taught then it was up for grabs in later grades. Each year we have added a few sacred novels to our list. Now that we have many more titles per grade level, teachers

have more choices, and fewer grade-level conflicts arise about the grade level for specifc books.

The second issue, closely connected with the sacred literature dilemma, had to do with content. As teachers began using more and more historical fiction, biographies, and nonfiction literature, teachers began abandoning textbooks in science and social studies. While these changes were certainly welcome, it created havoc with curriculum. No longer could we count on certain content being taught to students.

Thematic Studies

When looking at our curriculum in a broader perspective, we discovered that certain topics and themes were taught over and over and some not at all. For example, it seemed like every primary class had a unit on insects, dinosaurs, and Native Americans while some other important science and social studies topics were left out. So our students had an overdose of some content while having little experiences with other areas. Just as we had put some hooks into our scope and sequence of reading strategies, we decided to put some hooks in our content sequences by defining some topics and themes for district-wide emphasis.

We began our topic and theme identification with the language arts area. We decided on nine literature topics/themes per grade level—one for each month. Given that teachers wanted instruction integrated within the content areas, we defined themes that included some science and social studies topics as well as those classified as more literary. We selected science and social studies themes by examining our existing curriculum in these areas and by working closely with the science and social studies curriculum committees. We also asked teachers, through surveys and questionnaires, about the themes they were currently teaching or wanted to teach. Once we identified nine general themes, we defined each of them more specifically into sub-themes for grade levels. For each sub-theme we have class sets of one or more benchmark books or big books to initiate the theme. See Appendix A for a chart of the themes and benchmark books.

Let's take a more detailed look at how two themes play out at each grade level. First, let's examine the literature theme, Personal Feelings and Growth. Find this theme on the chart in Appendix A. Notice the theme narrows at each grade to a specific focus on per-

sonal feelings and growth. Each sub-theme is launched with either a big book (kindergarten) or a class set of books. For the primary grades the sub-themes focus on growing up and feelings. By the time children move into third grade, the theme expands into acceptance and then deals with change in grade four. By grades five and six, students explore issues about dealing with peers (grade five) and about adjusting within nontraditional families (grade six). Through the use of sub-themes, issues within a complex theme unfold in a natural progression. In this case, from a focus on the child to the child within a peer and extended family context. This evolution insures that children have fresh and rich ideas within a theme to explore through the grade levels.

When looking at our curriculum in a broader perspective, we discovered that certain topics and themes were taught over and over and some not at all.

For the second example, we will take the social studies theme, Yesterday. In kindergarten the theme focuses on Thanksgiving and early immigrants. In grade one, students learn about Native American legends. The class sets of books that launch and sustain this theme are *Legend of Blue Bonnet* and *Warrior Maiden*. In grade two the children explore early settlers. The class set of books is *A Long Way to A New Land*. In grade three, the book *Sarah Plain and Tall* is the catalyst for a sub-theme on the westward movement. The theme, early settlement, is studied in more depth in grade four with the benchmark book *Farmer Boy*. In grade five, we focus in on the industrial revolution. The books available for introducing this theme are *Lyddie* and *A Family Apart*. Finally, grade six focuses on World War II with the benchmark books *Stepping on the Cracks* and *Number the Stars*.

Current Reflections

Developing our sacred list of books turned out to be much more important than I initially thought. It has saved countless battles.

Defining our themes and sub-themes also proved to be a smart

decision. First, it began a system for tying our curriculum together. Identifying themes and organizing sub-themes at each grade level available helped teachers who wanted more direction feel comfortable using novels in their classrooms. Teachers certainly did not have to teach the nine themes, but at least they were available.

Second, specifying themes provided a logical way to purchase class sets of literature as well as other resource materials. For example, we know that in grade three our students will be studying insects and arachnids. Therefore, we are always on the lookout for books on these topics which could be used either for class sets, for small groups, or for individual research. Currently, we have two class sets of books available, The World of Ants and Spiders, *and we are just about to purchase some additional class sets of books on honeybees and butterflies.*

Third, defining our sub-themes and topics also became a precedent for other content committees.

Expanding Themes in Social Studies

During this last year, we have expanded our basic nine themes by adding sub-themes appropriate to social studies. Teachers have long complained that there is simply too much to teach in social studies. So the social studies committee decided to initiate what they named the "post hole" curriculum—less is more.

The social studies committee has followed a similar procedure to the one used in language arts for defining their curriculum. They surveyed teachers and are gathering input from students and parents. As a result of this groundwork, the committee decided to dig deep post holes into certain topic areas for in-depth study and to launch each with literature. The teachers decided to keep their old textbook as one of many references available to students for their indepth studies.

For example, no longer will fifth graders skim through the whole of American history. Instead the fifth grade curriculum focuses on only five areas: exploration, American colonies, westward expansion, human rights and the industrial revolution. Two of the post holes or themes are already a part of the official language arts curriculum, so the work is partially complete. Now that the committee has defined the post holes for K-6 social studies, its next step will be to select class sets of books (biographies, historical fiction, and other nonfiction books) as catalysts for each in-depth study.

Current Reflections

In retrospect, it made sense to launch our movement toward cross-curricular studies from the language arts perspective with a few initial forays into the content subjects. These forays worked so well that they sparked similar movements in the content areas. For example, the social studies committee followed our process of curricular change. Now, I am beginning to hear grumblings from elementary teachers about science. I predict that a similar post hole emphasis will emerge as teachers begin working on their science curriculum.

Once movement begins toward thematic studies, it begins to swell and consume the entire curriculum. This is exactly the kind of consumption I like to see. Of course, this process has not been smooth. Developing post holes and thematic studies meant that some teachers had to compromise and give up curriculum that they had already developed. Yet, building consensus through surveys and grade-level meetings helped build a majority voice. Throughout these entire efforts, all teachers participated in giving information to the committees—this proved essential.

Teacher Support

Another challenge, when changing traditional ways of teaching and learning, is to figure out ways to support teachers. About a third of our elementary teachers dove right in and thrived on finding their own way in teaching thematically, even with the ambiguity of not always knowing where the unit might lead. Others, however, remained more cautious and in need of support. We did our best to help through summer institutes, teacher inservice days and in releasing teachers to work with one another. But, as with any district, we are always faced with insufficient time and money for inservice. It seems like teacher support is always the first to go in any budget crunch.

Fortunately, we hit upon a golden opportunity. It began when the Kalispell teachers and I received an award from the International Reading Association for our literature-based reading program. As part of this award, we presented our exemplary language arts program at the International Reading Association Conference in Toronto.

A language arts consultant from Kendall-Hunt Company was in the audience and visited with us afterwards about observing our program in operation. Within the next few months, she came to Kalispell, spent time in classrooms, and talked with teachers and administrators.

Ultimately, Kendall-Hunt suggested a collaborative project in which they would hire teachers in our district to write up their thematic units so that other teachers could purchase them for use in their own classrooms. In return, Kendall Hunt agreed not only to pay teachers for their work but also to give the district class sets of books and all of the materials that the teachers wrote. The company also agreed to support teacher/authors in presentations at local, state, and national conferences.

I was asked to oversee the entire project, which included writing some additional support materials for teachers and editing the teachers' work. We also had two field test sights. After teachers wrote up their thematic units, Kendall-Hunt sent class sets of books and the teachers' draft units to field test schools in Florida and California. The field test teachers taught the draft units and added additional ideas and suggestions for improving them. With their input we revised our work, and Kendall-Hunt then published them as part of a cross-curricular program called *Pegasus*. Kendall-Hunt continues to work with us as we develop more themes.

The teacher written units turned out to be exactly the kind of support more hesitant teachers needed for moving into a thematic approach to teaching. The teacher units provided help not only in the teaching of strategies but also with a variety of instructional models to avoid "killing" the books and turning them into a basal lesson. Incorporated within the thematic units are our district's target skills. Each unit highlights three or four learning and writing strategies and is packed with ideas for extending the theme.

Current Reflections

We had incredible luck in being able to have support from a publishing company in writing our own curriculum. However, districts don't need "sugar daddies" to follow a similar progression. The critical aspect is that teachers were involved in developing and writing their own curriculum.

If Kendall-Hunt had not dropped into the picture, our district would have supported teachers in other ways. We have summer cur-

riculum money for teachers to write, and I would have offered graduate courses on teaching thematic studies where teachers would have received credit for writing up classroom ideas. This is exactly what we are now doing with our post holes in social studies. Several teachers worked this last summer in pulling together units on local history, Montana history and on the renaissance. Granted they are not as professionally packaged as our Kendall-Hunt units, but they do provide teachers with a rich place to begin.

School Change: A Progression of Critical Moments

As I think about the evolution of our curriculum to thematic studies, several critical moments come to mind. It is these critical moments rather than the content of our curriculum that is transferrable to other districts.

First, before any change can occur, there needs to be a sense of restlessness, a rising dissension in the ranks. This restlessness usually happens when teachers and administrators have opportunities to grow as professionals. It takes a while before the restlessness builds momentum, but administrators can facilitate this ground swell by encouraging teachers' professional growth and by constantly promoting the idea that instructional decisions come from observing and listening to children.

Once there is a critical mass of teachers who want change, it becomes time to build a plan. Our second critical moment occurred when teachers developed and publicized their philosophy of teaching and learning.

Our third critical moment was in clarifying what we felt our students deserved to know in a language arts program. The clarification of our targets, in effect, simplified a very complex area. Rather than scores of skills, we delineated a few powerful strategies that we could readily teach and evaluate. Having our targets so clearly specified provided everyone with the security of some structure but did not confine teachers to a prescribed curriculum.

The next moment was the definition of themes and subthemes. Having books and teacher-developed units available for teachers served as the final step to a cross-curricular approach.

What's Next?

At this point I can't fully predict what the future holds. I do know that next year we are going to develop a more comprehensive plan for assessment, and I predict that we will soon abandon traditional report cards. We are already beginning to have students lead their own portfolio conferences as a replacement for the traditional parent-teacher conference. Traditional grades don't make much sense any more. I also predict that we will bring more science studies into our cross-curricular themes.

In any event, I do know that our work will never be done as we listen to our children and learn from one another. We will continue to carve landscapes. As we carve, we must take time to view our work and identify those critical moments that make a difference. It is only when we know what has transpired that we can get a firmer grip on where we need to climb next. Take snapshots in a progression of time.

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For more information on the *Pegasus* program which was written by teachers in Kalispell, Montana, contact Kendall-Hunt Company, 1-800-258-5622, ext. 1057.

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Appendix A

Personal Feelings and Growth

K: *William's Time* (BB*) by Toni Gunnerson (growing up)
1: *Today was a Terrible Day* by Patricia Giff (personal growth)
2: *The Chalkbox Kid* by Clyde Bullaby (feelings)
3: *The Flunking of Joshua T. Bates* by Susan Shreve (acceptance)
4: *Kid in the Red Jacket* by Barbara Park (change)
5: *Facts and Fictions of Minna Pratt* by Patricia MacLachlan (dealing with peers)
6: *The Great Gilly Hopkins* by Katharine Patterson
Maniac McGee by Jerry Spinelli (nontraditional families)

Friends and Family

K: *Little Bear's Party* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (my friends)
1: *The Wonderful Pigs of Jillian Jiggs* by Phoebe Gilman (friendship)
2: *Amelia Bedelia* by Peggy Parish (family roles and responsibilities)
3: *Ramona Quimby* by Beverly Cleary (family roles)
4: *There's a Boy in the Girls Bathroom* by Louis Sachar (social growth)
5: *The Sign of the Beaver* by Elizabeth George
Finding Buck McHenry by Alfred Slote (peer acceptance)
6: *Summer of the Monkeys* by Wilson Rawls (self-acceptance)

Social Issues and Culture

K: *Rusty* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (disabilities)
1: *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michele Surat (acceptance)
2: *Happy Birthday, Grampie* by Susan Pearson
Wednesday's Surprise by Eve Bunting (aging)
3: *Helen Keller* by Margaret Davidson (disabilities)
4: *Snow Treasure* by Maria McSwigan (social conflict)
5: *Walking the Road to Freedom: Sojourner Truth* by Jeri Ferris (human rights)
6: *Dragon Wings* by Laurence Yep (immigration)

*BB stands for big book. It also includes sets of little books of the same title as the big book.

Imagination, Thought, and Humor

K: *The Gingerbread Man* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (fantasy)

1: *Lights Off, Lights On* by Anelise Taylor (imagination)

2: *Imogene's Antlers* by David Small (humor)

3: *James and the Giant Peach* by Roald Dahl
Catwings by Ursula LeGuin (fantasy)

4: *Owls in the Family* by Farley Mowat (humor)

5: *House of Dies Drear* by Virginia Hamilton
The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle by Avi (mystery)

6: *Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle
Mrs. Frisby and Rats of NIMH by Robert O'Brien (fantasy)

Folklore, Heroes, and Legends

K: *Three Billy Goats Gruff* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson

1: *Each Peach Pear Plum* by Janet Ahlberg
Nursery Rhymes (BB) by Kathryn Shaw

2: *The Ugly Duckling* by Lorinda Cauley
Sleeping Ugly by Jane Yolan (fairy tales)

3: *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* by Verna Aardema (folktales)

4: *The Defenders* by Ann McGovern (heroes/heroines)

5: *American Tall Tales* by Adrian Stoutenburg (tall tales)

6: *The Greek Gods* by Evslin, Evslin and Hoopes (mythology)

Yesterday

K: *Joshua Comes to the New World* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson

1: *The Legend of Bluebonnet* by Tomi De Paola
The Warrior Maiden by Ellen Schecter (early settlers)

2: *Long Way to a New Land* by Joan Sandin (other settlers)

3: *Sarah, Plain and Tall* by Patricia MacLachlan (westward movement)

4: *Farmer Boy* by Laura Wilder (settlement)

5: *A Family Apart* by Joan Nixon
Lyddie by Katharine Patterson (U.S. history)

6: *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (world history)

My World and Others

K: *Across the Country* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (home and country)

1: *Little Red Hen* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (rural)

2: *The Living World Deserts* (regional life)

3: *Santiago's Silver Mine* by Eleanor Clymer (regional life)

4. *Whipping Boy* by Sid Fleischman (early societies)

5. *Kavik, the Wolf Dog* by Walt Morey
Julie of the Wolves by Jean C. George (U.S. geography)

6. *Boy* by Roald Dahl (world geography)

Environment

K: *Saving Our Earth* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (caring for our world)

1: *The Cloud Book* by Tomi De Paola
Bringing the Rain to Kapiti Plain by Verna Aardema (weather)

2: *Pandas* by Miriam Schlein
Will We Miss Them? by Alexandria Wright
(environment and animals)

3: *Trash* by Charlotte Wilcox (earth science)

4: *Sadako and the 1,000 Paper Cranes* by Eleanor Coerr
Missing 'Gator of Gumbo Lumbo Swamp by Jean C. George

5: *Island of Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell
Hatchet by Gary Paulsen (survival)

6: *The Greenhouse Effect* by Rebecca Johnson
Tropical Rain Forests by Elaine Landau (environmental issues)

Living Things

K: *Changes* (BB) by Toni Gunnerson (animal change)

1: *The Three Bears* (BB) by Kathryn Shaw (large animals)

2: *Frog and Toad Are Friends* by Arnold Lobel (amphibians)

3: *Spiders* by Jane Dallinger
The World of Ants by Cynthia Overbeek (insects and others)

4. *Incredible Facts About the Ocean, Volume 2*
by W. Wright Robinson
Where the Waves Break by Anita Malnig (sea and sea life)

5. *Exploring the World of Birds* by Adrian Forsyth and Laurel Aziz
Bluebird Rescue by Joan Heilman (birds)

6. *Tracker* by Gary Paulsen
   The Talking Earth by Jean C. George (mammals)

About the Author

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